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A Manhattan Project II Against Nuclear Weapons

By Daniel Ellsberg

WASHINGTON — The events of the last nine months have created conditions that make 1992, the 50th anniversary of the Manhattan Project, just the time to launch a very different version of the original. Call it Manhattan Project II, aimed to undo the legacy of the first as completely as possible: to reduce nuclear weapons and the danger of nuclear war to near zero by the end of the century.

Fifty years ago, the pressure came from the prospect of a Nazi bomb. Now, as the example of the Iraqi nuclear program warns, the alternative to a successful Manhattan Project II may be a global profusion of new Manhattan Projects.

No new effort can uninvent nuclear weapons, nor can it prevent a later resumption of a nuclear arms race; even physically eliminating all weapons in national stockpiles could not assure that. But it does not follow that anything remotely like the existing arsenals or levels of danger should be tolerated any longer.

Welcome as they are, none of the Reagan-Bush-Gorbachev-Yeltsin proposals show a decisive shift away from Cold War nuclear doctrines, and none adopt a posture that discourages proliferation.

America still tests nuclear warheads, insists on its freedom to make first-use threats or to initiate nuclear attacks, and proposes to maintain nuclear "superiority" indefinitely, with an arsenal of thousands of warheads. It therefore is in no position to ask any country to forgo nuclear weapons altogether, to ask other nuclear states to restrain their buildup or use of threats, or to expect adequate international collaboration on enforcement.

The only legitimate function for nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack. As a corollary, the United States should join the Commonwealth of In-

dependent States and most of the non-nuclear states of the world in condemning threats to initiate nuclear attack. And America should join the 32 countries in the United Nations that in 1981 declared actual first use of nuclear weapons "the gravest crime against humanity."

There has been wide debate on what forces are required for the sole function of deterrence, but the discussion usually ends up on the high side. Yet Herbert York, the first director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, argued in a talk last year at the lab that the number of survivable weapons needed to deter the kind of adversary who can be deterred is far below the level of the 1,000 frequently mentioned. He suggested that the number is "somewhere in the range of one, 10 or 100," and "closer to one than it is to 100."

The U.S. government should propose registering and tagging all nuclear weapons. To set a model for reciprocal transparency, U.S. facilities should be subject to the same verification procedures that should be expected of the ex-Soviet republics and other nuclear states.

Before the Russian testing moratorium ends in October, America should join it and negotiate a permanent comprehensive test ban. As a less preferable alternative, America should commit itself to a permanent end to testing by 1995, which would allow time for the limited number of tests — fewer than 12 — believed by some to be needed for stockpile safety.

The next target date might be the end of 1993, a year into a new presidential term. By that time the United States should adopt the principle of no first use, rejecting in principle and in practice nuclear weapons as instru-

ments of policy or warfare. The remaining devices should be devoted to the single function of deterring nuclear attack. Also by that time, there should be a U.S. commitment to disable and dismantle (not merely withdraw from deployment) all tactical nuclear weapons, air-launched as well as sea- and land-based.

The United States should also commit itself to the provisions of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, narrowly interpreted. It should eliminate multiple warhead land-based missiles and existing silo-busting submarine-based warheads, and it should seek a mutual interim ceiling on total U.S. and Russian strategic weapons of no more than 1,000 warheads.

The three-year period of the original Manhattan Project suggests the next target date, 1995 — 50th anniversary of the Alamogordo test and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is also the year of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty review conference. Mid-1995 could be the deadline for all the nuclear states to:

- Commit to reduce strategic warheads to 500 at most, and preferably 100 or less in all nuclear states by the year 2000.
- End nuclear testing for good and sign a comprehensive test ban.
- Adopt the no-first-use principle.
- Commit to abolish tactical weapons, which would be totally dismantled by the turn of the century.
- End production of weapons-grade fissile material — with its use banned from civilian facilities — and put all production facilities, civilian materials and fissile materials recovered in the disarmament process under strengthened IAEA safeguards.
- Adhere to the spirit and the letter of the Nonproliferation Trea-

ty, seeking universal adherence to it, in the context of these changes; and agree to a greatly strengthened anti-proliferation regime.

If these goals are reached by the end of the decade, the era of nuclear threats will have effectively ended with the millennium.

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National Commission for Economic Conversion and Disarmament
National Peace Foundation
National Women's Conference Committee
Natural Resources Defense Council
NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Nuclear Free America
Pax Christi, USA
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Plutonium Challenge
Professionals' Coalition for Nuclear Arms Control
Psychologists for Social Responsibility
SANE/FREEZE: Campaign for Global Security
20/20 Vision National Project
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ, Office of Church in Society
Women Strike for Peace
Women for Meaningful Summits
Women's Action for New Directions
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
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